

City of Greenfield  
Assessor's Meeting  
November 19, 2020

ViaWebEx

9:00am

**CALL TO ORDER:** Meeting was called to order at 9:04 am by Chair Ruggeri

**ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS:** Chair Joseph Ruggeri, Chief Assessor Kimberly Mew, Administrative Clerk Sandra Gradoia.  
Guests Virginia Desorgher, Philip Elmer, Jean Wall.

Chair Ruggeri read the November 5, 2020 meeting minutes into the record.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Ruggeri, second by Mew, it was unanimously;  
**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2020 MEETING MINUTES.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Public comment was opened by Chair Ruggeri at 9:13 am

Jean Wall discussed properties and their assessed values. She would like the Assessor's office to look into these properties

- 53 Pleasant Street, multi family, 6 units, assessed value \$393,100
- 29 Franklin Avenue, multi family, 6 units, assessed value was \$369,300 now \$453,600
- 369 High Street

Chair Ruggeri thanked Ms. Wall and stated that the Assessor's office will look into these properties.

Phil Elmer made a suggestion if it was possible to do a data analysis on whose values are the most different than thier neighbors and look at the abnormalities. Also is it possible to get a list of people who deny inspections in their homes.

Christine Forgey joined the meeting at 9:17 am

Ms. Desorgher discussed three properties

- 155 Main Street
- 173 Main Street
- Argo Tec.

Jacqueline Thibodeau joined the meeting at 9:20 am

Ms. Desorgher mentioned a TIF on the properties previously owned by Argo Tech.

Mrs. Mew mentioned that the property might have had another TIF agreement and she will look into this. Chair Ruggeri suggested we put this on the agenda for the next meeting.

Ms. Thibodeau discussed her own property and felt it was over assessed. She felt there was a mistake on the assessment and was wondering if she will get any of that money back.

Mrs. Mew explained that Jeff Reynolds went out and made the change to Ms. Thibodeau's property and this will be discussed in Executive session. Ms. Thibodeau is welcome to stay and discuss her property.

Christine Forgey had no comment

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Mrs. Mew discussed Excise weeks.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE MOTOR VEHICLE EXCISE ABATEMENTS FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2020, FROM NOVEMBER 4, 2020 TO NOVEMBER 16, 2020.

Mrs. Mew discussed Pro Forma Tax Commitments. Mrs. Mew explained that these are properties that were bought at auction.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE PROFORMA TAX IN THE AMOUNT OF \$76.57 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 ON PARCEL 101-35.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE PROFORMA TAX IN THE AMOUNT OF \$15.56 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 ON PARCEL 51-7.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE PROFORMA TAX IN THE AMOUNT OF \$15.56 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 ON PARCEL 54-7.

Mrs. Mew explained for Parcel 54-7, the wrong parcel was entered so we are asking to abate the amount of \$15.56 on this parcel.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE ABATEMENT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$15.56 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 ON PARCEL 54-7.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE PROFORMA TAX IN THE AMOUNT OF \$547.41 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 ON PARCEL 89-21.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE PROFORMA TAX IN THE AMOUNT OF \$778.72 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 ON PARCEL 65-3B.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE PROFORMA TAX IN THE AMOUNT OF \$290.41 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 ON PARCEL 18-11.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE PROFORMA TAX IN THE AMOUNT OF \$191.25 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 ON PARCEL 58-41.

Mrs. Mew and Chair Ruggeri agreed to table the review for the Public Records Request Policy and wait for Clerk Letourneau.

## REPORT RRG/OFFICE

- Mrs. Mew discussed the Classification meeting, it went well. The help that people are offering has been great. Single tax rate has been passed unanimously.

Chair Ruggeri mentioned that we started to work on the packet for City Council in October and were in good shape to have it done early but with Covid we were trying very hard to work with what we have.

- Mrs. Mew discussed finalizing things for the state LA4 was approved.
- Mrs. Gradoia has been working on Permits, Deeds, 3 ABC's and will be working on the mailings for Income & Expense.
- Mrs. Mew discussed tax files that are not matching up between Munis and Patriot. For example properties showing up as exempt in one system and not exempt in the other system. Just trying to keep the wheels moving between the two systems. It would be nice to get the bills out before the holidays to give people more time.

Chair Ruggeri inquired about having an update for the next meeting.

Mrs. Mew responded saying it was possible. Mr. Reynolds has been working with Mrs. Mew side by side and it has been a huge help.

Chair Ruggeri inquired about John Franks status on commercial properties.

Mrs. Mew mentioned that Mr. Frank has come across LUC codes that are not listed properly and also medical offices should also have specific codes. Mr. Frank is adjusting those neighborhood codes for each property.

Chair Ruggeri discussed when looking at consistencies on properties do we take a look at what other towns and cities are doing?

Mrs. Mew mentioned she mails out letters to the properties that we look at. Owners have a right to say yes or no when it comes to an inspection.

Chair Ruggeri is inquiring about legal ramifications.

Mrs. Mew mentioned there is no legal ramification but reaching out to other towns to see how they handle these properties would be possible.

Mrs. Mew mentioned we need to schedule an in-person meeting for statutory exemptions and we will check in with Clerk Letourneau.

Chair Ruggeri mentioned public session is closing does anyone else have any comments or discussions.

Ms. Desorgher would like a copy of the TIF's sent ways and means.

Chair Ruggeri mentioned that TIFS are approved by the Mayor's office and are slowly coming back to the Assessor's office. Chair Ruggeri would like a list of properties who have TIFS.

Ms. Forgey inquired who is on the TIF committee.

Ms. Desorgher was able to provide names of those individuals.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Ruggeri second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO CLOSE PUBLIC COMMENT AT 9:59 AM

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Mrs. Mew, it was unanimously;

**VOTED:** TO OPEN EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 10:15 AM

Guests Ms. Desorgher, Ms. Forgey, Jean Wall, Philip Elmer left the meeting.

Clerk Dee Letourneau entered the meeting at 10:29am

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Clerk Letourneau it was unanimously;  
**VOTED:** TO END EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 10:42 AM

Mrs. Mew read the policy for Public Records Requests for Clerk Letourneau and Chair Ruggeri. The Board discussed and agreed that this policy was fair and equitable.

**MOTION:** On a motion by Chair Ruggeri, second by Clerk Letourneau, it was unanimously;  
**VOTED:** TO ADJOURN AT 10:50 AM

Next scheduled meeting is December 3, 2020 via WebEx

Respectfully submitted,  
Sandra Gradoia  
Administrative Clerk  
Greenfield Assessors  
BOA/sg

**Dear Kim, Sandra, Dee, Joe, and RRG,**

As you know, I am the City Councilor of Precinct 3 which is one of the poorest precincts in Greenfield. I was elected by people who live in small houses. Most of my constituents are seniors on fixed incomes. They own one home. They call me. They ask me if the tax deadline can be extended. And they are why I am here today. These people trust me to do the right thing at the right time. In six weeks, I'm supposed to decide whether to vote for an additional \$6,000,000 for a fire station. This vote comes at a time when most of the people in my precinct are wondering if they will even be able to see their families during the holidays. They are worried about paying their bills, their taxes, and putting food on the table. They've had a very hard year. I, as well as you, have a hard job to do.

I realize that you base assessments on many factors: comparable sales, neighborhoods, certain improvements, information reported to you by business owners on I & E reports and more. I question things because I care, and I can see inconsistencies. I research everything. I know you review the permit listing reports to see the property improvements being done in Greenfield. When I look at them, I see that some people are able to put in 25 windows for \$2000. Other people have knob and tube wiring removed for free. People have an addition put on, and it doesn't state the size. Others have the same work done, and it costs many thousands of dollars more, and the descriptions of the work are quite inclusive. I imagine that despite what is on a building permit, an addition or improvements to any building should increase its value. I also believe there should be consistency in valuing that work throughout the city which should be reflected by that building's assessment.

Recently I brought to the assessors' office two businesses that appeared to be under assessed: 347 Wells Street and 194 Cleveland Street.

#### **347 WELLS STREET**

Two businesses are operating on this property. I receive complaints about these activities on a daily basis. This property is 3.12 acres in the GI district and has 2 separate businesses operating on it. At the time of my July 2020 inquiry here, both businesses were fully operational without business certificates or permits. Acquiring them is now in process.

One business is a truck depot. Numerous eighteen wheelers stay there nightly. Some idle all night long. The second business is a local excavation firm. They are leasing space from the owner. Topsoil was removed leaving bare ground which created dust and pollution. Numerous trucks pull in and out of this site daily traveling down little side streets like Cypress, Cedar, and Spruce Streets. Neighbors complain. One woman moved because of her respiratory illness and the constant dust.

This property is currently assessed for \$143,000 which is less than any of the nearby homes and FAR less than any business on Wells Street. In August of 2017 the value of this property was \$337,200. At that time it had no businesses (see municipal lien certificates 2018-293, 2018-294, 2018-295, 2018-296 all dated the same day. This parcel was combined and sold to the current owner in 2014.)

An adjacent business is on 1.05 acres and contains storage units that do not move or make constituents move away. They are assessed for \$525,400 and pay their taxes.

#### **194 CLEVELAND STREET**

Again, it was constituents' complaints about the noise of trucks that prompted me to look at the property record card. In 2014, this parcel which was on 1.93 acres in the GI district was vacant and was valued at \$92,700. As a Planning Board member, I spent hours learning about cement batching and voted in favor of allowing it on this property. This property sold for \$180,000 in October 2014. That was double the assessment. Subsequently in 2015 and in 2016 building permits were issued, and \$90,000 of improvements were made. A permit visit by the assessor is listed on the card in 2017. Noisy cement batching trucks have been pulling in and out of this property for 6 years. Yet we have not adjusted this business' assessment in any way that reflects the resale, improvements, or the business activity. It is now valued at \$116,500.

#### **LAMPBLACK ROAD compared to 316 SILVER STREET**

The property record cards of 777 and 783 LampBlack Road show photos of the exact same shed instead of the houses. 789 shows a photo of a barn. 720 shows a little shed. On LampBlack Road most homes have very long driveways with houses that you cannot see.

316 Silver Street is pictured below. It is assessed for \$338,500 making it one of the most expensive homes in Precinct 3. It is located on 1.7 acres of land which is an enormous property for Precinct 3. It overlooks busy Silver Street on one side and Sandri's and the aforementioned cement batching plant on Cleveland Street on the other side. It is a colonial built in 1908. All the land surrounding this house is visible, and none is labeled undevelopable or is in chapter or any other such category.

I find it incredulous that it is assessed for more than 731 Lampblack Road which was built in 2000. #731 is labeled a contemporary. Contemporaries are less valuable than colonials so the label matters. We talked about colonial pricing at your last meeting. It appears much larger than the 1662 square feet listed on the record card. It has two sheds, two porches, and recently had major renovations. The living room was "enlarged" (measurements aren't available) and a 9x24' deck was added. They also added a new Cheshire shed and gazebo in the backyard. It's on 3 acres of land, and no one can see it. It is assessed for \$320,000. Well over \$100,000 in renovations are listed on the property record card. The assessment remained stable. The owner was given an abatement of \$825 after renovations were completed.

316 Silver Street is also assessed \$80,000 higher than 783 LampBlack which is a colonial and is situated on 7.81 acres. That colonial is 2128 square feet, and it was built in 2018. This new colonial on almost 8 acres of land is assessed for \$246,950. That assessment is LOWER than every condominium on Silvercrest Lane.

Please compare the above to 26 Fargo Lane, a colonial, built in 2010. Fargo Lane is basically in the same area of town. Fargo Lane has water but no sewer hookups. Homes are visible from the street. # 26 has slightly less than an acre, and it has has four bedrooms and 2 1/2 baths. The value of the building itself is \$224,100, and the finished area is 2080 square feet which is significantly higher than the building on LampBlack. The value of the entire property on 26 Fargo Lane is \$307,800. JOBJOBJOBJOBJOB Fargo Lane is quiet.

Lastly, look at the side by side beige condo in the photo. The condo on the left is assessed for \$272,600. The one on the right is assessed for \$273,000. Each has 2 bedrooms and 2 baths, and each is 1311 sq ft. That one unit is assessed for \$555,000 which makes its assessed value the same as the most expensive homes in Greenfield. They were built in 2010.

Owners of commercial properties have the ability to write off losses and often claim their renovations are practically free. The city has 15 plus people here who own multiple rental/commercial properties throughout our city. They pay a lot of taxes. Somehow when these properties are sold or foreclosed on, they are purchased by a different person, often in the same business. It was not easy for me to find out who owned each property because the owner's name kept changing. One week their name was Burn My Foot LLC. A few months later, their name was Bigfoot LLC but they were the same person<sup>(b)(6)</sup>. Very often, these rental/commercial properties are sold for a dollar. This has been extremely effective in keeping the cost of the rental properties down.<sup>(b)(6)</sup> That also makes it profitable to own a building on Main Street and have the store front vacant because vacancies can be written off. If the building costs \$1 and their renovation costs are very low, the property value may be kept artificially low. As you have explained to me, the owners could be very handy or in construction, but they are not all builders, and we know it. I know nothing about the accuracy of the income and expense reports. I only saw their inexpensive renovations. Streets where there are a lot of rental properties are coincidentally the streets we have not reassessed...sometimes for a very long time. There is a shortage of housing and the vacancy rate is minuscule. Rents have increased significantly. Assessments have not so my conclusion is that they are not paying enough taxes.

You have one of the most important jobs in the city. Some of you have lived here for a very long time. This makes the job of assessing more difficult. BUT done properly, and equally, we could be building two fire stations and a great big library, and have the best schools in western MA. Right now, however, we can't do ANY of that. If we allow the overtaxed Anitas of Greenfield, to move out of her home by turning a profit at her expense, we have failed miserably. But we didn't just fail Anita and her husband, we failed Greenfield. We failed our children and our grandchildren. We made it so that Greenfield couldn't afford to recruit and pay the best teachers. We have made it so that we can't build the things that needed to be built.

I came from Medfield. We had one of the top 10 school systems in Massachusetts. We built a fabulous new safety complex and new schools, and every single person in that town was taxed fairly. People honestly reported work done. We paid our fair share and took care of our town, each other, and our future. I know many people in my precinct like Anita are paying other people's fair share.

I have met with Kimberly Mew. Her integrity and enthusiasm and work ethic are amazing. I want to clearly state that these issues outlined above are not within the scope of the paid staff of the assessors office to correct without the approval of the elected officials.

Adjust the assessment of 194 Cleveland Street (and do so retroactively)  
Adjust the assessment of 347 Wells Street  
Adjust LampBlack Road  
Do a proper reassessment of commercial properties in general  
Assess the rest of our town so that the tax burden is shared fairly and equally.

Thank you all. I believe in the principle of the greater good. Working together, we can do anything.  
If you need my help, I am happy to put my shoulder to the wheel and help you in any way I can.  
Most gratefully, Ginny Desorgher